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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Note: The editor is not responsible for opinions expressed in this department. All communications must be accompanied by the name and address of the writer.

BRITISH NURSES AND THEIR FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

Dear Editor: Can any good thing come of war, such a war as this, big with frightfulness of every description? The answer is a clear and definite affirmative. That is the cheering, mitigating paradox, the partial compensation for the suffering, sacrifice and anguish of it all. Many good things *have* come out of this war, but the thing of fundamental importance which fires one's imagination is this: Freedom (which means opportunity) once given to any body of people, dormant faculties are immediately liberated, and great achievements for the public weal must follow. Without the work that women are doing in the furtherance of the war, much of which they were considered quite incapable of performing previously, the British would have been defeated in France and, possibly, the Germans might have reached England. The most indispensable of all women's work at this time, especially, is that of trained nurses. Their devotion to duty, self-sacrifice and heroism has been quite equal to that of the fighting men. I do not mean British nurses alone.

I am thinking in terms of internationalism, and that brings me to my central idea, *Internationalism!* What is it but a great spiritual alliance, which has united the nations of the Allies in their struggle for right against might, reinforced by armies of nurses. How thankful and proud we nurses feel of our own spiritual alliance which was founded long before the war, but it is the war which had made it a greater reality. We are no longer separate bodies of nurses, we are nursing allies, we are an indivisible whole taking our part in the nursing lines in the great war for the freedom of the world, the fight between the powers of darkness and light. It is a self-evident parable, just spoilt, however, by "the rift within the lute which by and by will make the music mute" unless—yes, unless it can be turned into harmony. We feel convinced that we shall have the sympathy, not only of the nurses of our dominions and of our Allies, but those also of neutral countries who have understanding hearts. I should, therefore, like to place before them through the pages of this JOURNAL a brief statement of the struggle that has been forced upon British nurses to secure and maintain their professional freedom.

The movement for the organization of the nursing profession by Act of Parliament was initiated about thirty years ago by Mrs. Bedford Fenwich, editor of the *British Journal of Nursing*. The work it has entailed has been unceasing and strenuous, but very fruitful. The expenses have been borne by the nurses themselves. All opposition had been broken down, and if it had not been for the war, the bill promoted by the Central Committee for State Registration would probably have been on the statute book by this time. The progress, however, has been much slower in our country than in others, where it has spread rapidly, with the result, as we know, that it almost encircles the world. In all but two states of the United States of America, many of our colonies, and other countries, acts are in force. We rejoice with them and they sympathize with us in our long, patient wait. Victory for us was in sight when a bolt fell from the blue! The College of Nursing Company, Ltd. came into being and took the field in opposition.

Without any reference to the opinions or wishes of the organized bodies of nurses, it started on its strange career and ordered itself on the lines of archaic

autocracy. Let there be no misunderstanding, my sisters, we have long desired to have a College of Nursing but we want it to be a *professional* body. This foreign body is a *lay* corporation, a limited liability company (without share guarantee), the signatories of which are all laymen; and these laymen have appointed the first Council and the Consultative Board. Subjugation of the nursing profession and not its freedom, is the thing aimed at.

This parody of a nursing college has drafted a bill for state registration and, consistent with its autocracy, it has again excluded from both the provisional and permanent councils, all representation of the organized bodies of trained nurses and other vital principles which are embodied in the bill drafted by the Central Committee for State Registration. In a word these iconoclasts desire to pull down the fine educational structure which has been built up laboriously by the registrationists, and set up in its place a destructive imitation. This College of Nursing Company, Ltd. presumes to liken itself to the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons (in England, Scotland and Ireland). As a matter of fact, it is in no way comparable. It is scarcely necessary to remind the readers of this JOURNAL, that a College, being an educational body, should not concern itself with registration and discipline. A general nursing council to be set up under a registration act would be the authorized body for registration and discipline.

Our humiliations do not end here, however, but rather begin! Under the auspices of the College of Nursing Company, Ltd., the British Women's Hospital Committee, which consists of members of a section of the Actresses' Franchise League and others, has promoted a charity scheme for nurses, falsely called "The Nation's Fund for Nurses," and this is blatantly paraded by pictorial and other advertisements all over London. In the meantime, self-respecting nurses are blushing with shame and hot with anger. Our opinion is, that at this awful crisis in the life of the nation, all surplus money should be spent for the benefit of our heroic sailors and soldiers, and the starving and suffering women and children in the countries overrun by the barbarous foe. If the state did its duty and paid an adequate salary to our military nurses, instead of mere pocket money as at present, there would be no need to insult them by offering them charity. As voters, we now demand that schemes for reconstruction shall include greatly increased salaries for *all* nurses.

The mischief and danger of this College of Nursing Company, Ltd., can be seen by any intelligent reader at a glance. It unjustifiably assumes a monopoly of control over the entire nursing profession, desiring to govern it *without consent*. The one humorous bit about it is that it calls itself *democratic*. The subsidized press has boycotted the opinions of independent nurses upon this and other subjects that concern them closely, so we have to adopt new methods of protest, namely, the sandwich boards in the open streets. We desire economic control of our own profession and we mean to fight for it until we get it. Our slogan is "Liberté, Fraternité, Égalité." When the mendicants come round to your doors asking for charitable doles for British nurses, as we hear they intend to do, you will know what we think about it. Furthermore, you will foresee the danger of large funds amassed by and administered by, society ladies and gentlemen on behalf of trained nurses. The great thing that must arise out of this war is the deepening and broadening of the spirit of alliance among nurses all over the world.

BEATRICE KENT,

Delegate of the National Council of Trained Nurses of Great Britain and Ireland, to the San Francisco Convention in 1915.

P. S.—Since writing this, another bill has been drafted by the College of Nursing Company, Ltd. We do not consider it any improvement upon the last, although representation to the Central Committee has been granted.

Dear Editor: Referring to letter initialed "E. Q.," Iowa, on page 727 of the May issue of your publication, I am directed by the Surgeon General to request that the statement given therein to the effect that the government does not supply the sterilizing basins, Murphy drips and medicine glasses to the army hospitals be contradicted. Basins and medicine glasses are purchased by the Medical Supply Department of the Army by the thousand, and Murphy drips as needed. It is quite evident that "E. Q." wrote this letter through ignorance of the proper way to obtain the usual articles for the equipment of her ward.

DORA E. THOMPSON,

Superintendent, Army Nurse Corps.

(As a matter of fact, the letter referred to in the May JOURNAL, signed "E. Q.," was not sent to this office with any idea of its being given publicity. The writer had contributed an article to a previous number of our magazine, for which, as a matter of routine, she was sent a check. She wrote to say that she had not expected compensation, but had sent the material in the hope of inducing other nurses to enroll. We replied that if she did not feel like accepting the check for her personal use, we were sure she would find many ways of using the money in the care of her patients. A later letter regarding another matter, contained the paragraph which we published, with no thought on either her part or ours of criticising the Government. Our idea was simply to show her generosity.—Ed.)

A REPLY

Dear Editor: My attention has been called to a letter by Miss Greenthal in the last issue of the JOURNAL. It should hardly be necessary for me to say that the statements which I made at the recent meeting in Cleveland did not refer to the Mount Sinai Hospital. In any such connection they would have been not merely discourteous but obviously untrue, since this hospital and training school are well known for their liberal government and progressive methods. I am glad to take the earliest opportunity afforded me of saying how sorry I am not to have guarded against any possible misunderstanding of my words.

New York

M. ADELAIDE NUTTING.

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